DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 448 492 CS 510 492

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TITLE	Inferring Cultural Learning Styles--Puerto Ricans in the U.S.
PUB DATE	2000-11-00
NOTE	22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Communication Association (86th, Seattle, WA, November 9-12, 2000).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Classroom Communication; *Classroom Environment; Cognitive Style; Cultural Differences; Elementary Secondary Education; *Hispanic Americans; *Puerto Rican Culture; *Puerto Ricans; Time
IDENTIFIERS	Communication Behavior

ABSTRACT

People learn differently. One model for instruction does not suit all participants well, especially when those participants are from different cultural backgrounds. Based on research into the speaking patterns of Puerto Ricans in the United States, as well as in Puerto Rico, inferences can be drawn about how those patterns of communication would translate into preferences for teaching and learning. For example, following Morris (1981) it has been documented (Milburn, 2000) that there are two different senses of time that participants at a Puerto Rican Center orient to when conducting business in the United States. A sense of time labeled "Puerto Rican time" has been shown to be more fluid and flexible and as preferable in some situations where socializing and community is foregrounded. From this finding, we may be able to infer that the structure of some classroom situations, with strict time rules for particular subjects, may not be the most optimal learning environment for Puerto Ricans who orient to time this way. In this paper, several communication patterns and the corresponding learning situation that may be implicated by such patterns are explored. (Contains 23 references.) (Author/RS)

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ED 448 492

Inferring cultural learning styles -- Puerto Ricans in the U.S.

by

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Presented at National Communication Association annual convention
November, 2000
Seattle, WA

Abstract:

People learn differently. One model for instruction does not suite all participants well, especially when those participants are from different cultural backgrounds. Based on research into the speaking patterns of Puerto Ricans in the United States, as well as in Puerto Rico, inferences can be drawn about how those patterns of communication would translate into preferences for teaching and learning.

For example, following Morris (1981) I have documented (Milburn, 2000) that there are two different senses of time that participants at a Puerto Rican Center orient to when conducting business in the U.S. A sense of time labeled, "Puerto Rican time," has been shown to be more fluid and flexible and as preferable in some situations where socializing and community is foregrounded. From this finding, we may be able to infer that the structure of some classroom situations, with strict time rules for particular subjects, may not be the most optimal learning environment for Puerto Ricans who orient to time this way.

Therefore, in this paper I will explore several communication patterns and the corresponding learning situation that may be implicated by such patterns.

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Introduction

There has been a great deal of research about learning styles. The Canfield Learning Styles[1] inventory, The Dunn, Dunn, and Price Learning Style Inventory, or Kolb's Learning Style Inventory[2] are examples of such tools that have been developed, measured, and refined, in order to assess students various learning styles. Several studies have described the usefulness of these types of assessment on the classroom interaction, claiming that teachers who know their styles are better able to adapt to different learners and that students who are made aware of their styles can alter their study habits to adapt to their learning preferences.

In order to address questions of learning styles it may be useful to apply findings from cultural and intercultural research. Given the current state of education in the United States, with diverse populations and calls for reforms of the system due to low test scores, the issue of learning style and culturally diverse learners warrants extended attention. Furthermore, given that much of the research in the area of learning styles has grown out of Education and Psychology departments that focus on either the instructional method or the individual's mind, I believe that communication scholars, who focus on the way that learning is accomplished interactionally, can make a significant contribution.

One contribution we can make is to identify some of the cultural assumptions present in the discourse of the creation and use of learning styles inventories. One of the assumptions that we can identify quite readily from the construction of self-report inventories is that "learning" is considered to be an individual accomplishment. This assumptions carries the additional premises that it is the responsibility of teachers to instruct or facilitate learning (depending upon one's pedagogy) and it is the responsibility of individual students to learn and to be able to demonstrate such learning according to those teacher's standards.

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[1] Canfield Learning Styles instrument is a self-report questionnaire that examines learning-style preferences based on affective behaviors such as conditions for learning, area of interest, mode of learning and expectation for course grade

I believe that a researcher's orientation to what counts as learning for a particular culture should be examined before first, weighing the findings from these types of studies and second, when composing additional studies about this topic. Teachers for their parts, should weigh factors of credibility of the findings before implementing classroom changes.

I posit that the categories used to assess learning styles themselves do not capture the relevant areas of group/cultural difference. I suggest that by examining the way members of a particular culture learn, and noting features of their conversations in particular, that we can find seemingly subtle characteristics that may having implications for a "learning style." These learning styles can be useful to help students from diverse backgrounds and cultures become more successful in their classes. Further, by creating culturally sensitive instruments, psychometricians, politicians, school administrators and teachers can learn to recognize how the "actual" learning of a particular group of students may vary because of not only the way a test is constructed but because of some specific assumptions about learning.

To begin, I will review some of the learning styles' literature to demonstrate some of the assumptions and conclusions about learning that do not recognize cultural differences.

Learning styles

There are some theorists (Cornett 1983) that define learning styles very broadly. For instance, Oxford (1997) describes learning as "the general approaches students use to learn a new subject or tackle a new problem." This and other definitions (Schmeck, 1988) describe learning as strategies or methods students use in order to learn, such as "gathering, organizing, and evaluating information" (Howard, 1998). The external factors that lead one to choose or modify one of these methods are also considered by some, as the context or learning conditions. This context can include one's ability to concentrate and absorb and retain information, cognitive perception, field dependent and independent (viewing the world globally as opposed to

[2] David Kolb identified four learning modes, concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active

analytically) (Howard, 1998). These are all considered factors that may influence learning styles.

Some definitions combine learner and context in their definitions (Keefe 1979). Consider Grasha (1990) who states that learning styles are "the preference students have for thinking, relating to others, and particular types of classroom environments and experiences" (p.26).

There have been several studies about learning styles related to various national, ethnic or racial groups (Goduka, 1998, Ladd & Ruby, 1999). These studies have focused on how members of various populations score on the same inventories. The same scale is used in order to examine national, ethnic or racial differences. Of the research that I reviewed several are warrant closer consideration.

Only one study examined the influence of linguistic diversity. This study was conducted in South Africa. Goduka (1998) found that there was a relationship between culture and learning style. Based on his findings, he suggests that classrooms should affirm learner's different languages and cultures. This research does not make the claims that styles differ from language explicitly. However, I believe that it is prudent of us to look at language differences for differences in interpretation and meaning. For as Ong (1982) noted,

> *Human beings in primary oral cultures, those untouched by writing in any form, learn a great deal and possess and practice great wisdom, but they do not "study."*
>
> *They learn by apprenticeship – hunting with experienced hunters, for example – by discipleship, which is a kind of apprenticeship, by listening, by repeating what they hear, by mastering proverbs and ways of combining and recombining them, by assimilating other formulatory materials, by participating in a kind of corporate retrospection – not by study in the strict sense* (pp.8-9).

Other studies suggest specific teacher or instructor methods that are preferred by different students. For international students, Ladd & Ruby (1999) found that although "80% of

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experimentation, and for learning styles, accommodation, assimilation, converging, and diverging

the students had learned by the lecture method in their home countries, the results of the Canfield Learning Styles Inventory indicated that they preferred to learn by direct experience." Ladd & Ruby (1999) posited variables to examine in international student populations. These can be summarized as one's attitude about how personalized one's teaching and learning should be. The examined preference for interpersonal interaction versus impersonal activities such as reading & lecture, preferences for developing and maintaining warm, friendly, interpersonal relations with other students, preferences for personal knowledge of, mutual liking for, and understanding of their instructors, preference for learning through listening, preference for working with numbers, belief in success in schoolwork. Finally, they suggest that these same students may have problems understanding lectures due to their lack of facility in English language as well as their shyness and passivity.

Ladd & Ruby's (1999) findings indicated that international students were classified as "neutral learners." They suggest that this may indicate their wide variety of approaches or preference for noninvolvement. "Our findings are consistent with Cheng (1987), who report that most international students in the United States must shift from the lecture method to a freer learning environment – that is, they must adapt to solving problems instead of memorizing facts and must learn to locate information themselves instead of depending on their professors" (p.3). While Ladd & Ruby recognized that there are cultural differences in what counts as knowledge, and the role of the teacher in different cultures, I believe that their way of characterizing international students, and focusing on their problems, is part of the research that poses a deficit model of learning by non-native English language speakers, as well as by U.S. minorities.

Oxford 1997 described additional research that described different approaches to classroom technique based on different philosophies of knowledge. Three types of learning were discussed, Cooperative Learning which fostered leaner interdependence; Collaborative Learning from a social constructivist philosophical base, "views learning as a construction of knowledge

within a social context and which therefore encourages acculturation of individuals into al earning community;" Interaction Learning which is based on an ability and willingness to communicate, language tasks, style differences and group dynamics.

In sum, the research defines learning styles in four ways: as characteristics and preferences of the classroom instructor, the instruction style or context (learning environment), learner's preferred style of instruction or his or her own personal characteristics or attributes in processing information. One of the main premises of the educational theory of learning styles is that learning is an individual achievement. When this achievement fails to measure up to some objective standards, the learning styles' research has stepped in to combat this deficit. Beginning from a deficit model or assuming that the learner has a problem that can be corrected by knowing his or her style, is a dangerous place to begin.

Interestingly, most of the learning-styles' studies conducted with culturally diverse populations have found little significant differences between groups with only slight differences noted. The findings suggest that styles vary across "individuals" within any particular culture. These findings give little justification for pursuing learning style differences by group. Within approximately 200 such studies that I reviewed, there were no studies about Puerto Rican specifically[3].

Puerto Rican Styles of Learning

Given the absence of research on Puerto Rican learning styles, I will suggest some areas where future research may find fruitful based on my own data[4] as well as information from the literature. The three areas I examine include the use of time, the way decisions are made, and direct versus indirect speech.

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[3] Latinos were described as a group, as were students from Caribbean islands. Mexican-Americans were the most frequently cited Latino group specified.

[4] I conducted participant-observation at a Puerto Rican Center in a northeastern city with a large Puerto Rican population during 1994-1995. Findings are based on audio and video recorded conversations of board meetings, events and interviews.

When thinking about teaching and learning, one should consider not only time of day preferences (Callan 1999), but also how a culture's definition of time is meaningfully enacted and may influence teaching or learning. A Puerto Rican sense of time has been documented (see Hall,[5] 1976, Morris, 1989, Milburn, 2000) as a fluid sense of time. As these authors have stated, there are at least two types of "time" that are described and oriented to in different contexts and for different purposes.

First, there is a sense of time that can be referred to as "American time" (*hora Americana*). This reference to time functions as a marker to regulate events and activities within events. Participants act with a constant awareness of and orientation to those time marker boundaries. In the second sense of time, "Puerto Rican time," events are oriented towards socialization; described as "people time" and the "social hour." Being aware of differences between the two and having the ability to know when to move from one into another (i.e. when instructed or when context calls for it – business on "American time," socializing on "Puerto Rican time" is a unique feature of Puerto Ricans in the United States.

How are these two senses of time relevant for teaching and learning? Callan (1999) describes that there is often a mismatch between student's time of day preference for leaning and the actual instruction times of classes. Noting that for many individuals there is a temperature peak that corresponds to an increase in memory after 3 p.m., after the school day typically ends. Some results indicate that teaching elementary students during their time of day preference increases performance. Further suggestions are given to improve persistence for particularly African American and Hispanic students by adapting to time of day preference and instruction given. These findings indicate a need to attend to the context of instruction, or when it may be optimal for particular cultural groups to learn.

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[5] Edward Hall (1976) described "American" time as "monochromatic" (MC) which "emphasized schedules, segmentation and promptness" (p 17). In contrast, he considers Latin America and the Middle East to operate on "polychronic time" (PC) which is "characterized by several things happening at once" (p 17). Hall explains that when people operating with different time orientations come into contact, there can be confusion and misunderstandings.

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For instance, it has been documented (Shotter, 1993) that Hopi Indians' sense of "time" structures their ways of acting differently based on their language for describing time. In particular, Hopi would use "time" words as adverbs. To describe something happening they would use a form that in English would be translated into "morning-ing." By using time words in an adverb form, "morning-ing" describes an activity that is in the process of occurring. This way of speaking does not "contain" time at all. Hopi are not bound by "structured" time because time is not described or talked about as a "thing" or object. This description of time allows for events to be enacted as a process.

Puerto Rican time can be compared to Hopi time, in the use of the Spanish words, "*atardeciendo, anocheciendo, amaneciendo*" which can be translated into "it is becoming afternoon, night and morning" respectively. Similar to the Hopi, the Spanish words function as adverbs. Furthermore, one can say that it is "becoming morning" -- or as in the description of Hopi, "morning-ing" which means close to "while morning-phase is occurring" (Shotter, 1993, p.143). By using the term, "*amaneció*" one conveys the past sense of it being morning or "it morninged." For the Hopi, "nothing is suggested about time except the perpetual 'getting later' of it" (Shotter, 1993, p.143). This is similar to the Spanish words like "*amaneciendo*," meaning, "it's getting morning."[6] Consequently, instruction that creates discrete segments of days into learning activities may be less meaningful and even potentially pose a hindrance to those who use time in this way.

While the learning styles' literature describes the use of time more from a physiological perspective, these instances of time talk do indicate a place we should consider when trying to have all students succeed in the classroom. Is there a way to facilitate learning for some students who switch from Puerto Rican to American time? Is there a place for activities to be conducted in "Puerto Rican time" for all students? Is it enough just to know that these differences exist?

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[6] Personal communication with Chris Christian, Ph.D.

Similar to and perhaps, influenced by this sense of Puerto Rican time, the way that decisions are made in one Puerto Rican Center demonstrated a fluidity and a particular style of speaking that is often not valued or recognized as potentially positive in classrooms.

Decision Making

As noted that events operating on Puerto Rican time can be characterized by fluidity, so to do some conversations during business meetings proceed in a fluid[7] manner. The sequence of one person speaking at a time does not hold true for some meetings held at the Puerto Rican Center. After one person begins speaking, others can, and do respond and join in the conversation. Additional voices are added until finally, everyone is using his/her statements to come to a group resolution (consensus). Other properties of this decision-making sequence include the use of rising intonation, qualifiers, questions and hedges. By having others respond and join in, decisions will be made with the input of all participants. The group gets involved in this joint decision-making process[8].

By participating through questions, comments, and suggestions each person adds his or her voice to the table and participates in a well-orchestrated description and understanding of a particular problem or issue. Each voice is added through repetitious phrases. The definition or constitution of the topic at hand changes, shifts, and becomes altered slightly by participants who engage in this collaborative, spiral process. Through this process meaning is jointly constructed and then celebrated through one or two single voices, whose voices function to state, or reiterate, the agreed resolution of the group.

This form seems to highlight the importance of group relationships as well as to achieve consensus in decision-making. This type of collaboration builds or is the result of strong rapport between participants. The norm stemming from these practices is that the group, through such

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[7] This fluidity is a fluid sense of "time." Time has been described as a devise for rhetorical organization (Hoffman, 1992). Hoffman describes the use of verb tense to signal a sense of past, present or future within a rhetorical text.

[8] This "way of speaking" may have implications for responsibility and blame. For example, by layering statements one upon the other, no one person becomes responsible or accountable for an idea or decision, but the group gets credit or blame jointly.

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collaboratively built utterances makes decisions, rather than by individually owned, or uttered statements or opinions. This norm is based on the value of the group over the individual. Further, such collaboration, through the use of hedges, questions and qualifiers, provides an enactment of politeness and respect for the authority of particular role positions within the group. This talk has a fluid character and follows a spiral sequence. Consensus becomes the outcome of decisions made with collaborative utterances.

A similar style has been described for the Aboriginal people of Australia. For instance, the criticism that "Anglos" make of the Aboriginal Australians is similar to the characteristics of the talk among Puerto Ricans. "Anglos" criticize Aboriginal Australian discourse as "excessively repetitive" and as occupying "more **time** than is necessary for making adequate decisions" (my emphasis, Libermann, 1990, p.178). This criticism stems from valuing talk that is "not repetitive" and that privileges decisions that are made quickly and efficiently in a logical, linear sequence.[9]

In addition, Libermann states that the school system serves to "individualize" the Aboriginal children, helping them to "live as individuals, and as persons" (p.182). This "Anglo" value of individualism, and concomitant way of speaking that constructs this value, is predicated on an "popular American" norm that privileges understanding people as "individuals" who deserve respect. Part of that respect entails allowing one person at a time "the floor" to speak. What is valued are individual's "opinions." These opinions are offered regardless of how they may differ from the group's opinions. This "popular American" way of speaking highlights, "the individual voice." As Carbaugh (1990) points out,

> what is hidden is the collective sayings. So conceived, proper communication enables everyone to speak individually, while disallowing one person's, or 'the majority's,' opinion to dominate others (p.131).

[9] By recognizing the values that are embedded in one's criticism, we can hypothesize that perhaps what "Anglos" take time for might be considered too much time, or not valued by Puerto Ricans.

Because the decision-making process mirrors the value of a fluid sense of time with an emphasis on community rather than individuals, the context of learning as an individual accomplishment is called into question as the only legitimate form for learning. The way that consensus is achieved through collaborative turn-taking should alert us to the possibilities that it may not always be individuals in classrooms who should be sought to find the "correct" answer, but rather a teacher should recognize that what is constructed collaboratively in the classroom may be more culturally relevant and meaningful for some participants.

Indirectness

The next area I want to focus on is a use of language that is characterized by indirect rather than direct speech. One assumption from most of the learning styles literature was that researcher's followed a transmission model of communication. This model describes communication as a process of message transmission from one individual to another. Knowledge or learning is likewise understood as a transmission of information from one individual, usually from the teacher to the student. This model of communication does not leave room for more jointly constructed ways of communicating, or for considering that communication may be used for purposes other than merely transmitting information/knowledge.

There are implications for how talk sequences are structured in a classroom. One speaker at a time, no overlap is usually the norm. Individuals are held accountable for their actions that may make them stand out from the group in a socially negative way and be detrimental. Recognizing these acts and specific speaking pattern preferences or norms, can help an instructor adapt to cultural differences.

Searle (1975) describes "indirectness" as one kind of speech act. His premise is that speech acts that can be identified as "indirect" or "direct." "Direct speech acts are defined as utterances in which the propositional content (sentence meaning) of the utterance is consistent with what the speaker intends to accomplish (speaker meaning). For indirect speech acts such a

relation need not exist and sentence meaning and speaker meaning may be different" (Holtgraves, 1986, p.305). What the speaker "actually" means may be less important, and therefore more difficult to characterize, with certainty, as direct or indirect. Furthermore, the definition of indirect (and direct) speech acts do not create a way to get at the cultural significance of similar forms. How speech acts might be done differently within different settings and scenes, and how they may have varying degrees of importance based on who says what, when and others' reactions are all questions to consider instead of relying upon a predefined "indirect" construct/speech act.

Carbaugh (1989) and Tannen (1990) describe a mode of talk that can be found on the continuum of "directness/indirectness." While the direct--indirect continuum may convey certain cultural messages about communication, if it is not used as a semantic dimension based on the "native's" vantagepoint, it is not very useful interpretively. For example, Tannen (1990) suggests that male and female speaking styles can be characterized as direct or indirect depending upon the situation: "when trying to negotiate mutual preferences and decisions, women are often more indirect than men. But when it comes to talking about their personal relationships and feelings, many men are more indirect" (p.276).

There is a Puerto Rican form of speech known as *indirectas*. *Indirectas* are an indirect way of making something known. Morris (1981) describes the use of *indirectas* among Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico as games that are used to define a person socially. He states that *indirectas* are,

> literally, indirect statements critical of others - insinuations, innuendo. They are disguised or purposely vague to any but the initiated, but clear in meaning to the ones who know the circumstances or the people involved. In form they do not give away either the person speaking or the person spoken of; they seem not to be barbed and directed to particulars, but they are meaningful in context. Anyone who is 'in the know' does know how they are to be applied (p.102).

Given that *indirectas* are indirect statements, they become more easily recognized by speech acts that point to any ordinary act with more implications than other listeners may be aware. The structure is as follows:

1. An *indirecta* is thrown (said, uttered).

This may be all that is necessary for one to exist.

2. The *indirecta* is caught (acknowledged).
3. One asks why the person who caught it is identifying himself or herself.
4. The refute can be accepted or challenged further by the person throwing the *indirecta* by questioning why the other person becomes defensive or identifies him or herself with a vague statement.
5. There is an implication of guilt of the person who caught the *indirecta*.

While this is one way for the *indirecta* to unfold, the entire sequence is not always necessary. One may have enough cultural knowledge to recognize that one was implicated in an *indirecta* without having to acknowledge it.

Morris (1981) relays the following story that illustrates the use of an *indirecta* that follows at least the first two components of the structure:

> There are two yards separated by a high, chain-link fence. On the one side live a couple who own dogs, on the other a man who employs a number of workmen. One day, while some of the workmen are present, the man addresses the woman in a loud voice and asks if she is going to keep her dogs, and she says yes. He then says that he is pleased to hear it, because that way he knows no one will cross over from her yard into his to steal - not meaning her, of course, but thieves off the street. Still, the woman puzzled over this for a long time until she realized that the neighbor - who had in fact been robbed several times - was speaking 'through' her to his own men, in effect warning them not to steal from her, and suggesting to her that she keep a sharp eye on his employees (p.64).

Here it was the woman who finally understood that an *indirecta* was used. Her realization came later, and it wasn't even she who was implicated. If the workmen, for example, understood the statement (*indirecta)* to be directed at them, they could have made the "rain" statement and the man speaking could have replied, *porque te picas?* (why are you pointing to yourself, identifying

yourself, I didn't say that it was you). As it was, this did not occur and the *indirecta* may have gone uncaught by the men for whom it was intended.

Persons would not necessarily want to identify themselves as the recipients of an *indirecta.* There is a prominent saying in Puerto Rico (in Spanish), "he is curing himself in health." This means, roughly, that one addresses something before it has been made explicit. Another Spanish saying closely related is "he is identifying himself." Given the value of the "community" over "individual," the act of identifying oneself would set one apart from the group and that would result in being an outcast from the more valued group position.

To compare what an "*indirecta*" is and other ways of being direct and indirect I will describe the many ways in which Puerto Rican speech (at least within the Puerto Rican Center) can be considered indirect. This includes speaking:

1) through pronouns rather than names (person reference, rather than reciprocal address);
2) through claiming that there is "no problem" rather than identifying the problem, there is an immediate negation of a problem;
3) through flexible time boundaries, not directly "on time";
4) through overlapping turn taking, rather than one person speaking at a time (which might be considered "direct");
5) through spiral sequence, talking around a topic rather than talking about one topic at a time and moving on to the next (in an agenda format);
6) through collaborative utterances rather than directly completing one's statements (by oneself), statements are "filled-in" by others;
7) talk which foregrounds "community" rather than "individuals" may be considered indirect.

Within all of these ways, an "indirect" mode is used. So, it is this system of expressive practices together that create Puerto Rican speech and may be viewed as "indirect."

Indirectas are not done by (direct) address nor through pronominal person reference (which would also be a more direct way of referring to someone). Rather they are done through ambiguous ways of referring to persons. For example, a woman might talk about "women who have certain kinds of husbands." This type of statement may "fit" someone in the conversation, and one would only know if one knew the history of the persons. Therefore, there is an assumption of a common or commonly known history (it must have been privately "shared" at some point, and now the *indirecta* is used as a "public" way of referring to something that one knows about someone.)

The *indirecta* can serve multiple functions, such as communicating something to a third party who is not being directly addressed in the conversation, such as in the example above with the male workers. In a group it can also serve to imply certain alliances with some group members and chastising others (who are the target of the *indirecta*).

An *indirecta*, while usually having a negative connotation, may be a way of saving face. A statement can be made "off record" so that the speaker does not have to be committed to a particular intent (throwing it out there leaves an escape both for the thrower of the *indirectas* and for the person who picks it up - who may want to talk about it). Brown and Levinson (1978) describe the action of indirectness as a type of hint that communicates "without doing so directly, so that the meaning is to some degree negotiable" (p.69). The indirectness and face saving aspect are explicated by Brown and Levinson, and fit well within the definition of *indirectas*.

I have discussed the *indirecta* at length to make that "how" patterns of speech are "direct" or "indirect," or what type of speech counts as "direct/indirect" varies culturally. Therefore, the contexts in which the direct-indirect dimension is used is very important. In board meeting scenes, this semantic dimension seems to be operating. It may be operating in classrooms as well. How activities are taught and how knowledge is accessed are prime areas to consider. For instance, there may be a preference for indirect speech by students to learn and

demonstrate learning and a preference or undeclared command to teach and evaluate learning through direct speech. How indirect speech may be used and interpreted is important for educators to understand.

Implications

The notion of learning itself as an individual accomplishment is contestable. The data presented above have illustrated a strong "communal" style of talking in a Puerto Rican group as well as similar examples from the Hopi and Aboriginal Australians. In these communities, we find people who speak and act so as to value and foregrounds relationships rather than autonomous, "individual" selves who are cast as apart from the community. While the data I have presented is not of the type that has typically been gathered to demonstrate differences in learning styles, I believe that it demonstrates new places to look for potential differences that have an impact on what is understood as learning in various communities.

Decision-making by participants in board meetings can be seen as an enactment of a communal form of participation[10]. The point is not just how communicative activities such as decision making are performed, but how that helps us to understand how behaviors in a classroom are based on similar communicative processes. This analysis helps us to understand that questions such as when students and teacher speak, towards what purpose, how and by whom is learning enacted and demonstrated and how doe the context or scene influence that as well as the particular cultural backgrounds of the participants. One could interpret the "decision making" done in the Puerto Rican Center board meetings as a hierarchical way of doing things instead of looking at it as a preferred way of enacting communal relationships through a consensually negotiated process.

Or similarly, one can look at a classroom as a teacher instructing rather than facilitating everyone to come to a common understanding of the subjects.

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[10] Katriel (1991) has described the value of communal participation in some contemporary Israeli scenes.

There are other ways of understanding learning from a cultural perspective. One stems from research conducted by Labov (1969) that demonstrates the existence of forms of Non-standard English[11]. While his claims may be controversial in some circles, they do point to the potential existence of ways of communicating such that speakers describe and learn about the world in such a distinct way that they would not demonstrate success on standardized exams.

The existence of the possibility that there are other ways of learning, can be noted by research conducted by Briggs (1986). He found that merely having the expectation that asking a question will lead to a meaningful answer could be deceptive and misleading for researchers. His research clearly calls into question the assumptions and premises upon which traditional learning theories and models have been formulated. Specifically Briggs found that there was a problem of control, when an interviewer creates questions that control the topic and the way the interview situation is structured. In this traditional method, the interviewer presumes that his or her form will be adhered to and meaningful to those interviewed. However, in Briggs' experience, the "elders" (in the Mexicano community he examined) retained control of both the topic and the structure of the interview situation by refraining from giving answers to questions posed by Briggs, or by simply answering, "who knows?" to his questions. Who has control in which situation needs to be discovered for each cultural scene studied, not assumed by an interviewer.

He suggests that the first step in learning about a culture is by observing the naturally occurring pedagogical styles in order to match the actual methods/practices of "questioning/learning" used in a particular culture. In order to learn the pedagogical styles, it is necessary to spend some time in the field observing the metacommunication rules/norms.

[11] Which includes a category he referred to in his research as nonstandard Negro English (NNE). This term has been referred to as Black communication more recently (Daniel & Smitherman, 1990).

Attending to these rules and norms helps one to understand the frame of reference that particular people use to ask questions, teach, learn, or convey information.

With the number of Puerto Rican's living in the United States increasing, according to *Puerto Ricans in the United States: A Changing Reality* (1994),

> from close to 2 million in 1980 to over 2.7 million in 1990. This growth, which led to a population 35 percent larger in 1990 than in 1980, was more than three times the rate of growth of the overall American population during the decade (p.v),

those trying to understand teaching and learning within the United States would do well to attend to the communication and educational practices of Puerto Ricans.

Future Research

Future studies should examine Puerto Rican learning in situ. One place where this might occur is through the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF). PRLDEF, on behalf of Puerto Ricans and the wider Latino community, seeks to preserve Latino culture as well as to secure, promote and protect full civil and human rights through a variety of means. One of which is by achieving educational excellence. Some of the services provided by the PRLDEF Education Division include:

- One-to-one pre-admissions counseling (including personal essay development)
- Admissions, personal statement and financial aid workshops
- LSAT preparation courses

The presence of this center, which opened in 1972, demonstrates the need for further research into Puerto Rican learning styles. For instance, when students are preparing their statements for their law school applications, are their ways of organizing written documents or relating personal narratives that may be considered a Puerto Rican style? Are there particular behaviors in the classroom that are preferred by Puerto Rican students (either by the instructors or the students) that could enhance their LSAT preparation?

Another type of research that may help to identify particularly cultural learning patterns would be research that focuses on children. This type of research would examine how "asking" (Briggs 1986) is done culturally at a young age, before children are socialized into current educational practices of asking and answering questions. Perhaps by focusing on Puerto Rican families, researchers could try to determine the language used to teach and instruct by parents and the cultural norms for responding and demonstrating knowledge that may be applicable to classroom instruction.

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